

Coordination with Employers

Initiatives with employers to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities to facilitate the provision of VR Services and Transition Services

The Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS or Division) has been very proactive in working collaboratively with employers. These initiatives consist of:

Project Skills: Project Skills is a paid work experience program for high school students with disabilities in South Dakota. The program is a cooperative arrangement between the state vocational rehabilitation agencies and local school districts which provides students the opportunity to learn different skills in a variety of job placements, with the assistance of a job coach. Project Skills helps to build the student's work history, references and assists them with experiencing different career fields as they mature and take on new challenges. The Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and school staff identify employment sites, businesses, employers to match the areas which students have expressed an interest in working.

Project Search: Project Search is a national model partnering with a large employer, local school district and the State Vocational Rehabilitation Program. South Dakota currently has 3 Project Search Initiatives in operation at Aberdeen, Brookings and Sioux Falls. A 4th Project Search initiative is being developed in Rapid City to begin with the 2016 Fall school year.

“Ability for Hire” campaign: “Ability for Hire” is an employer outreach campaign emphasizing the promotion of hiring, advancement, and retention of employment for people with disabilities in South Dakota’s workforce. The content materials consist of a website (www.abilityforhire.com), printed materials in the form of brochures, radio advertisement, commercials, and videos of the Governor and other success stories. It officially launched on 08/11/2015, with the release of the website and Facebook page. This is also designed to promote the public’s awareness of the available resources and services that DRS offer to employers and people with disabilities.

Point of Contact: The Division has designated a single point of contact (Business Specialist) to disseminate materials, conduct trainings, and serve as a resource to employers, providers, and people with disabilities throughout the state.

Business-Led Models: There are two non-profit entities available in South Dakota offering supports to the business community which are led by employers (business-led model). They are the Business Resource Network in Sioux Falls and the Workforce Diversity Network of the Black Hills. Each has an Executive Director. Both of them have an approved contract in place with the Division to provide education, consulting, and technical assistance to businesses on the hiring, accommodations, supports and retention when employing people with disabilities.

Business Organization Involvement: The Division is working towards increasing memberships and regular involvement of staff within non-disability related organizations in efforts to connect with employers. Some examples of the organizations consist of the local Chamber of Commerce, Society of Human Resource Managers (SHRM), and the South Dakota Retailers Association. These opportunities

allow for connecting with businesses to learn more about their workforce needs and identify any disability training needs they may have.

Employer Resource Guide: The Division has created an Employer Resource Guide consisting of information and resources available to employers regarding various aspects of disability-related topics. This Resource Guide will be utilized during meetings with employers.